



THANJAVUR

CITY OF BRIHADEESWARA

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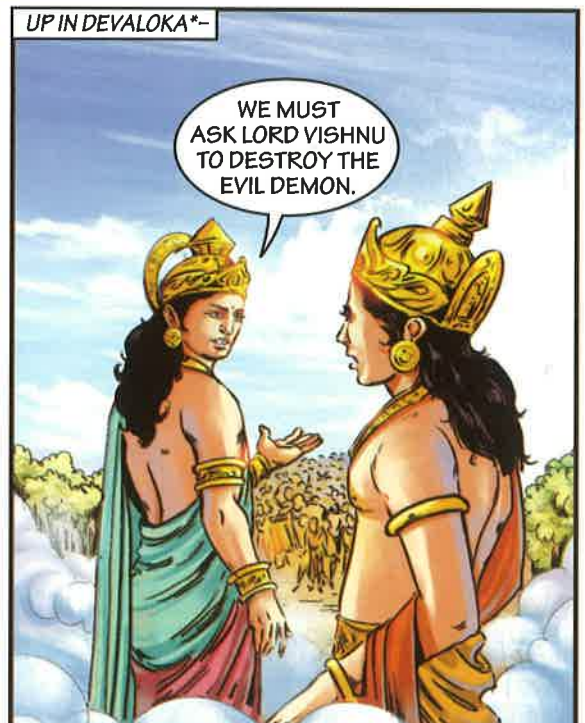
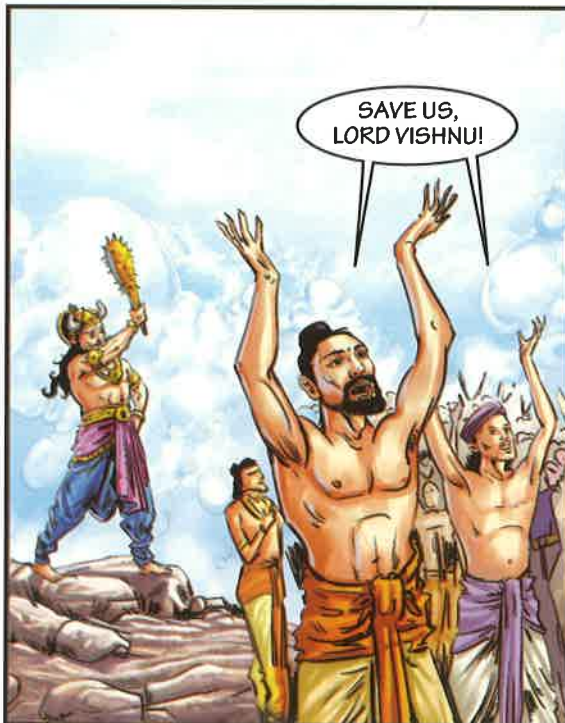


THANJAVUR



BUILT BY RAJA RAJA CHOLA I, THE BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE TOWERS OVER THE HISTORIC TOWN OF THANJAVUR, IN THE HEART OF TAMIL NADU. FOR CENTURIES PEOPLE HAVE MARVELLED AT IT AND AT THE OTHER ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECES BUILT HERE BY VARIOUS CHOLA MONARCHS. THE MONUMENTS ARE STEEPED IN HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY. OUR STORY GOES BACK TO THE BIRTH OF THANJAVUR.

ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER KAVERI, LIVED A WICKED ASURA NAMED THANJAN. HE TERRORISED THE PEOPLE LIVING THERE.



* THE ABODE OF THE GODS

VISHNU CONFRONTED THANJAN ...



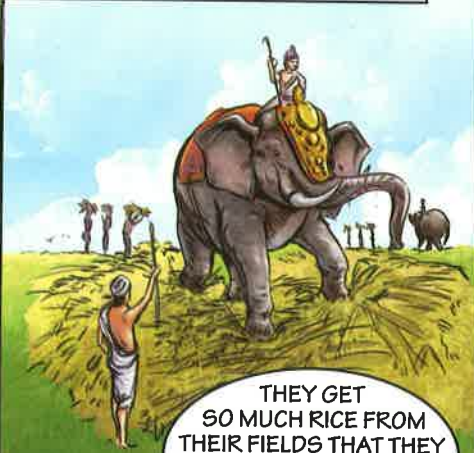
... AND VANQUISHED HIM.



MY LORD!
GRANT ME ONE WISH
BEFORE I DIE. LET A
TOWN OF GREAT BEAUTY
COME UP AT THIS SPOT
WHERE YOU HAVE
DEFEATED ME.



THANJAN'S WISH WAS GRANTED AND THANJAVUR OR THANJAN'S UR* WAS BORN. POETS SANG PRAISES OF THE FERTILE LAND AND ITS WEALTHY PEOPLE.



THEY GET SO MUCH RICE FROM THEIR FIELDS THAT THEY USE ELEPHANTS INSTEAD OF OXEN TO THRESH THE PADDY.



THE WOMEN FLING THEIR HEAVY GOLD EARRINGS TO CHASE AWAY THE BIRDS THAT PECK AT THE GRAIN THEY PUT OUT TO DRY.



THANJAVUR BECAME THE CAPITAL OF THE CHOLA KINGS IN THE 9TH CENTURY CE. AROUND 945 CE, PARANTAKA SUNDARA CHOLA II RECEIVED HAPPY NEWS.



THE QUEEN HAS HAD A BABY BOY!



* UR MEANS PLACE AND IT IS PRONOUNCED 'OOR'.



WE SHALL NAME THE BABY ARULMOZHI VARMAN.

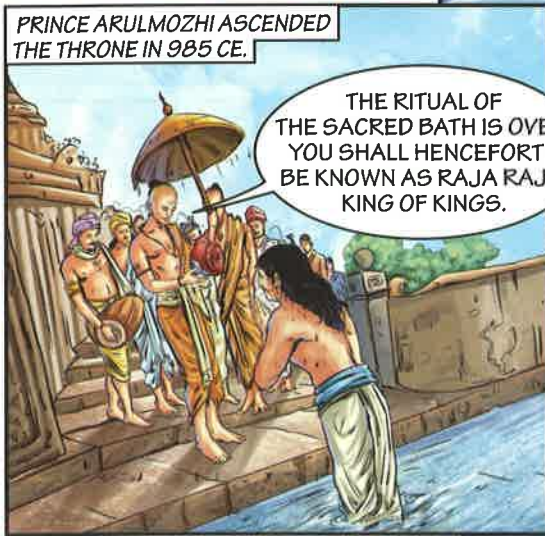
ONE WHOSE WORDS ARE PRECIOUS. WHAT A LOVELY NAME!

IT IS SAID THAT THE MANY WIVES OF THE SERPENT ADISESHA* DANCED WITH JOY AT PRINCE ARUL'S BIRTH.



HE WILL RELIEVE OUR HUSBAND OF CARRYING THE BURDEN OF THE EARTH!

PRINCE ARULMOZHI ASCENDED THE THRONE IN 985 CE.



THE RITUAL OF THE SACRED BATH IS OVER. YOU SHALL HENCEFORTH BE KNOWN AS RAJA RAJA, KING OF KINGS.

KING OF KINGS HE DID PROVE HIMSELF TO BE. FOR UNDER RAJA RAJA'S WISE AND MATURE LEADERSHIP, THE CHOLAS BECAME A GREAT POWER.



WE SHOULD GO TO WAR AT ONCE, O KING, AND CONQUER NEW TERRITORIES!

NO, WE MUST FIRST TRAIN OUR SOLDIERS AND CREATE A STRONG ARMY.

* ALSO KNOWN AS SHESHNAG, AND IS SAID TO SUPPORT THE EARTH ON ITS HOOD.

EIGHT YEARS WENT BY.

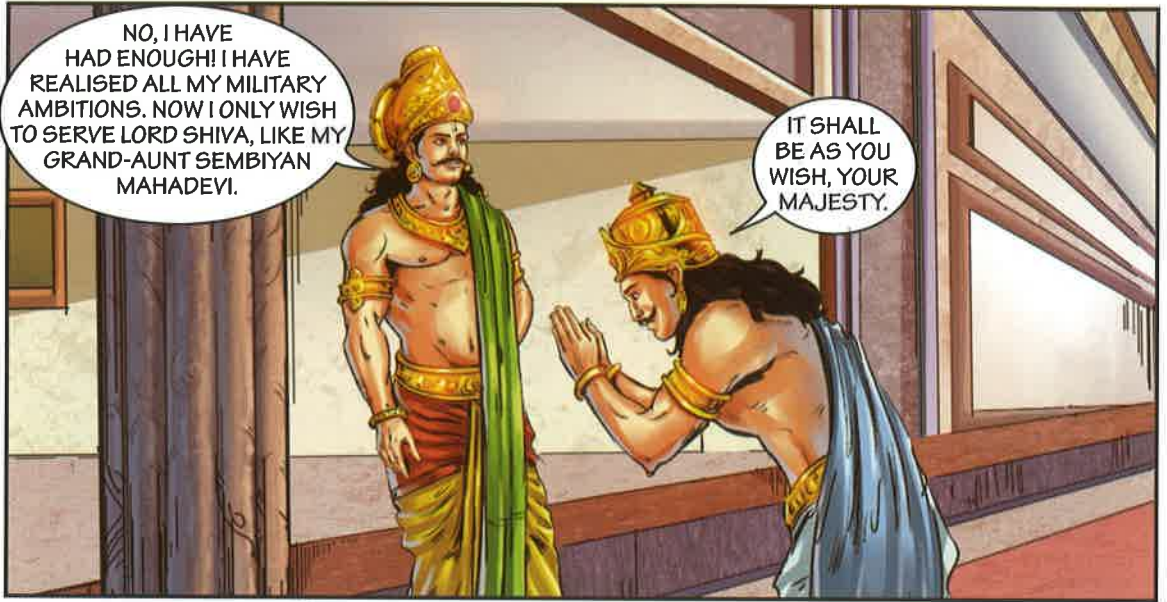


RAJA RAJA SPENT THE NEXT FEW YEARS CONQUERING NEW TERRITORIES.



* KERALA
^ MALDIVES

^^ ORISSA



IN HER TIME, SEMBIYAN MAHADEVI HAD BUILT MANY TEMPLES IN AND AROUND THANJAVUR. ONE OF THE TEMPLES WAS AT KONERIRAJAPURAM.



LEGEND HAS IT THAT EVEN AFTER MANY ATTEMPTS -

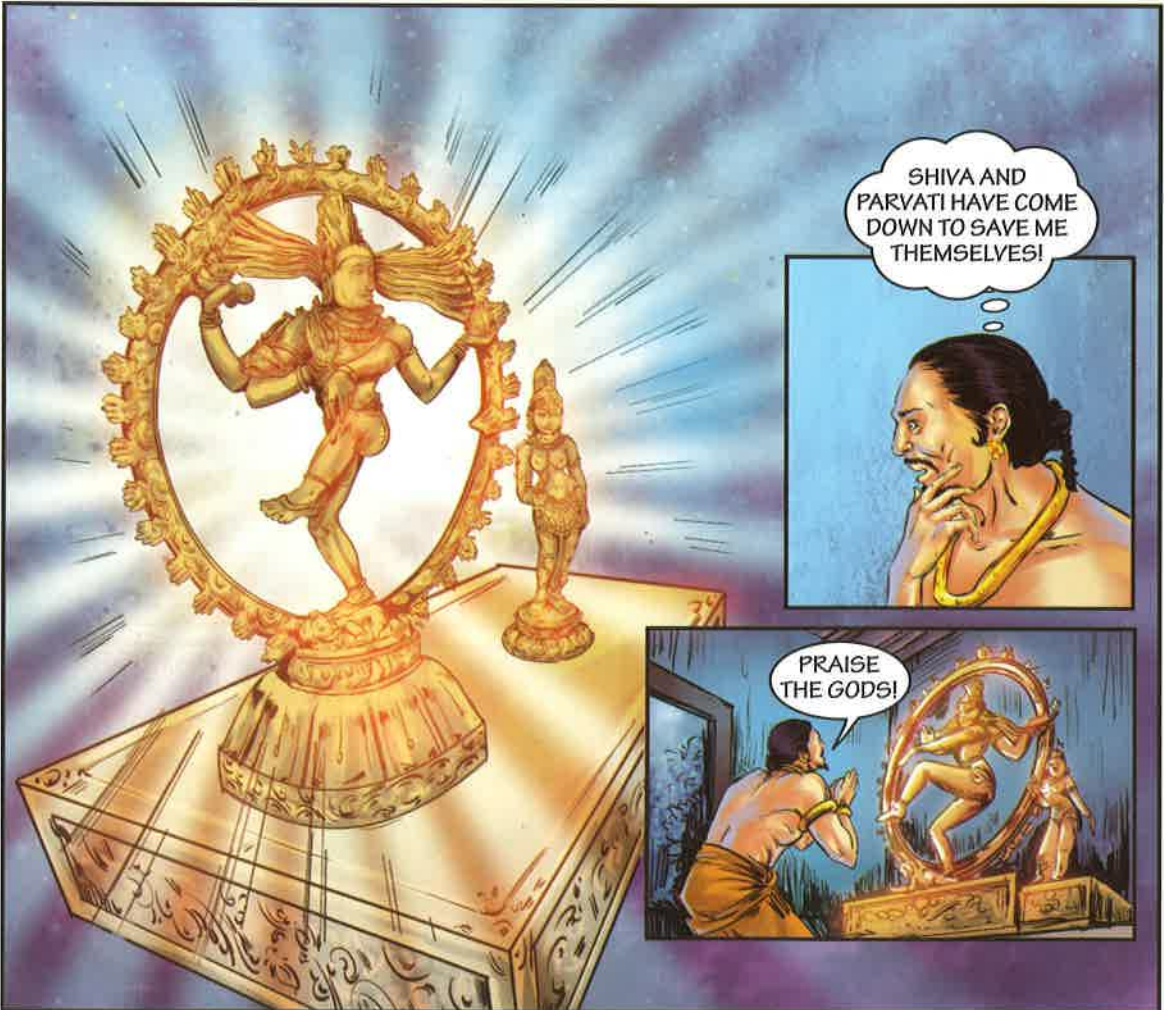
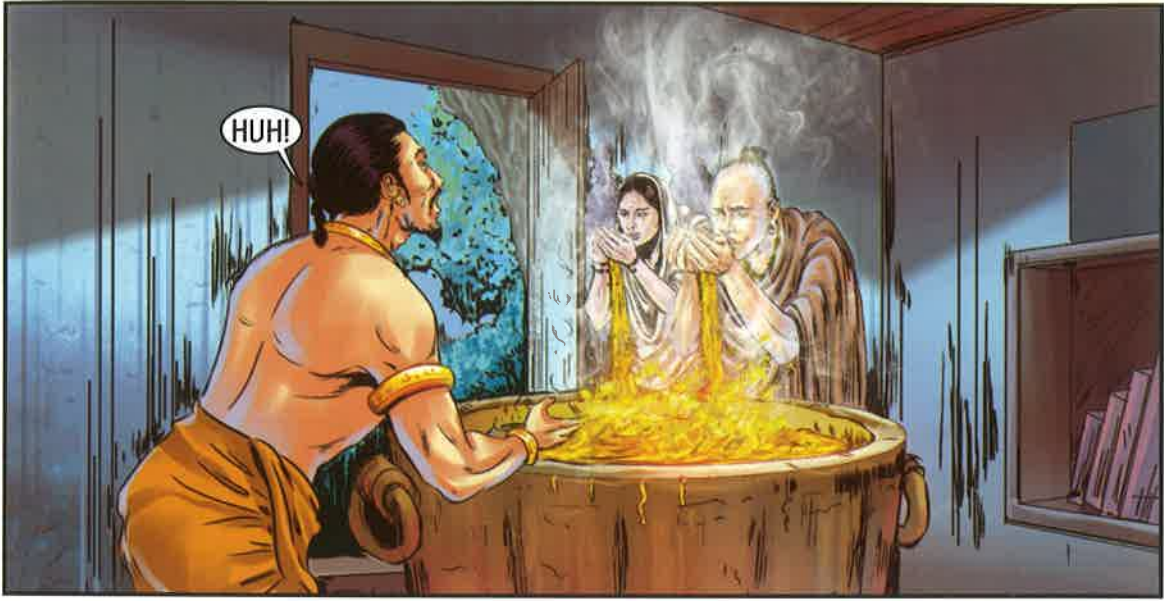




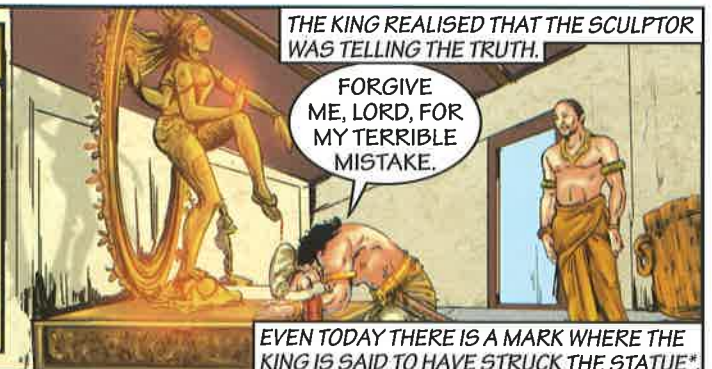
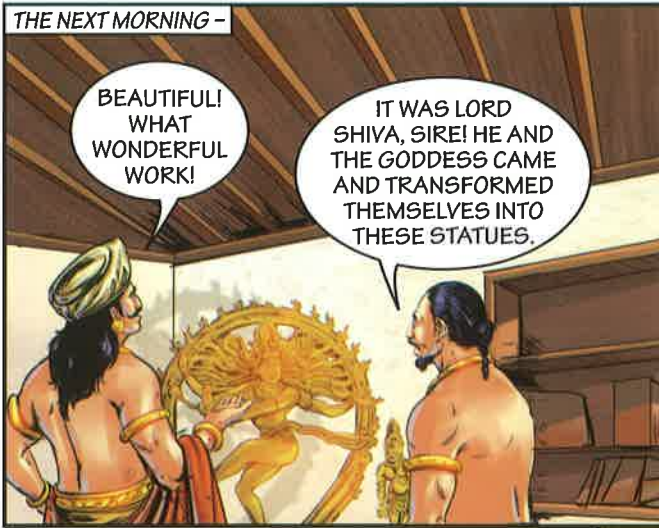
WHEN THERE WAS JUST ONE NIGHT LEFT, THE SCULPTOR HEARD A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.



*BRAHMIN COLONY



THE NEXT MORNING -



*IT IS SAID TO BE THE WORLD'S TALLEST BRONZE NATARAJA.

LIKE HIS ANCESTORS, RAJA RAJA WAS ALSO A GREAT DEVOTEE OF LORD SHIVA.



AT TIRUVARUR -

YES.

LOOK AT THE KING. HE IS LOST IN THE MUSIC.

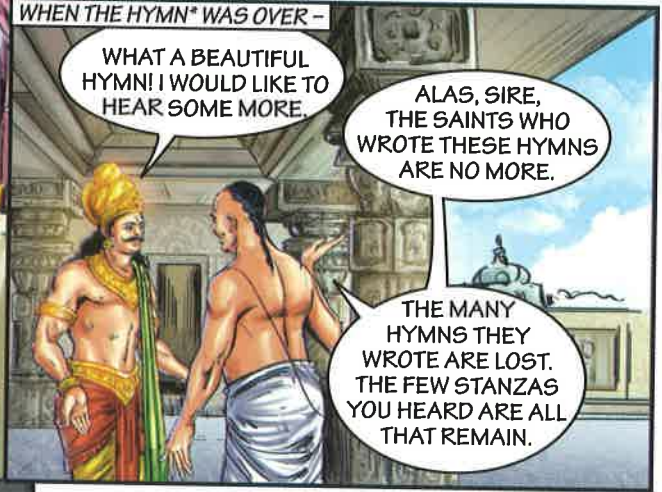


WHEN THE HYMN* WAS OVER -

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL HYMN! I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR SOME MORE.

ALAS, SIRE, THE SAINTS WHO WROTE THESE HYMNS ARE NO MORE.

THE MANY HYMNS THEY WROTE ARE LOST. THE FEW STANZAS YOU HEARD ARE ALL THAT REMAIN.



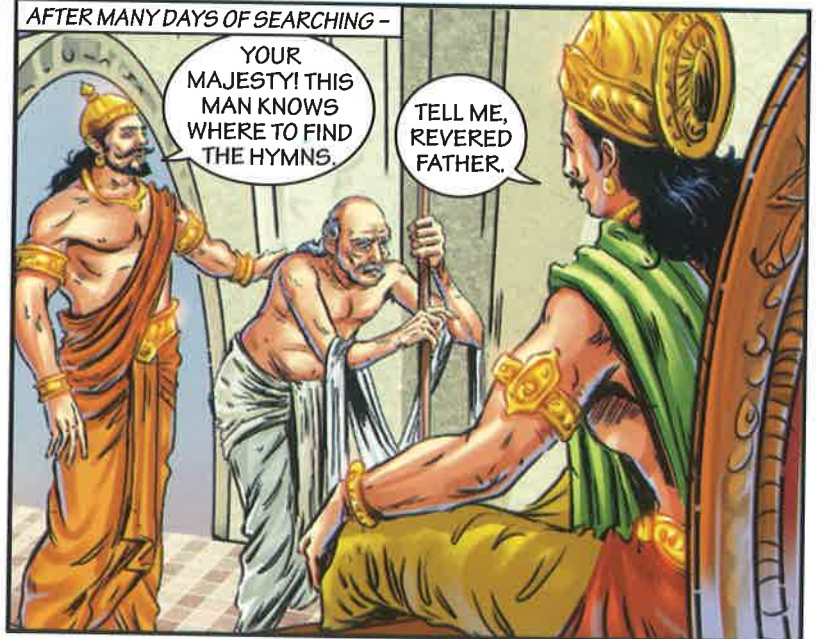
THEN LOOK FOR THEM! THIS IS A ROYAL ORDER!



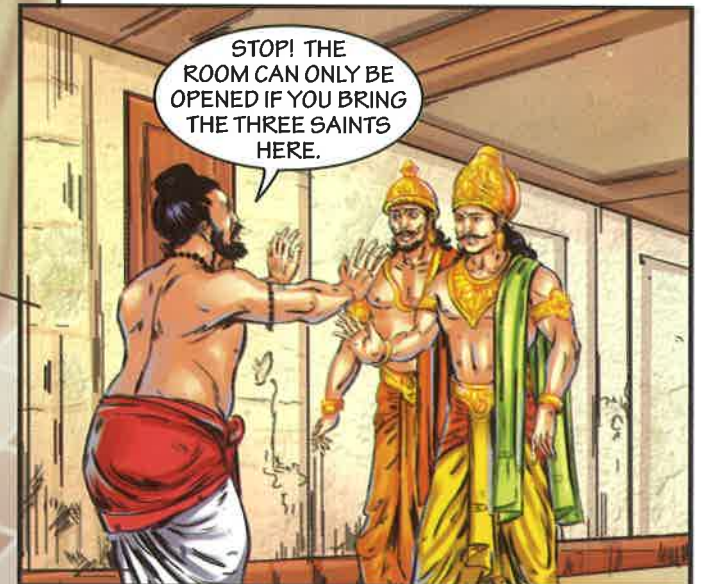
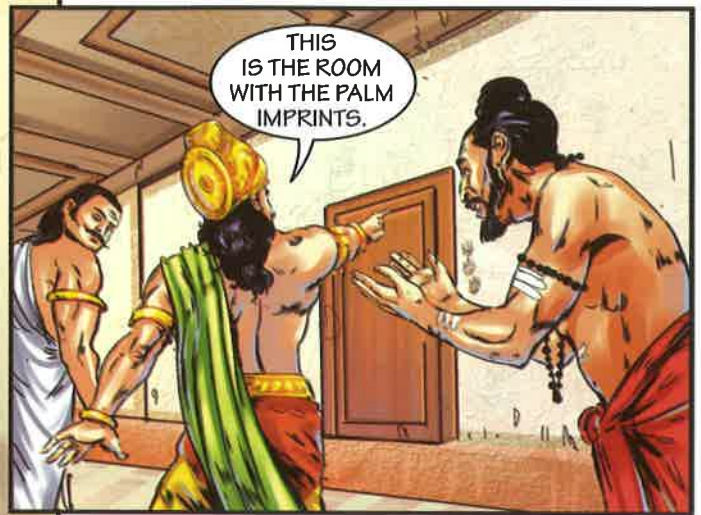
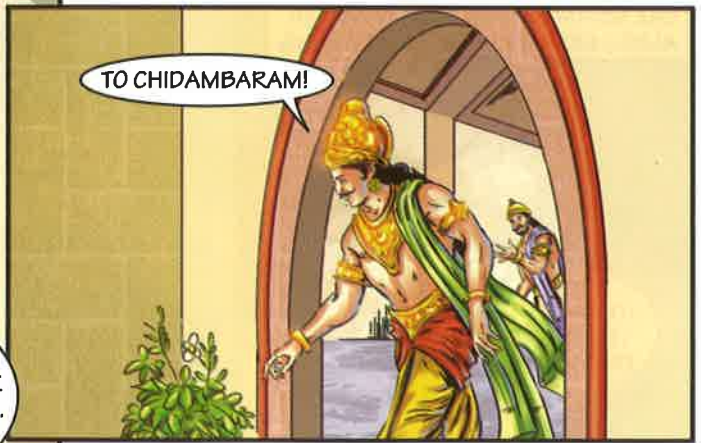
AFTER MANY DAYS OF SEARCHING -

YOUR MAJESTY! THIS MAN KNOWS WHERE TO FIND THE HYMNS.

TELL ME, REVERED FATHER.



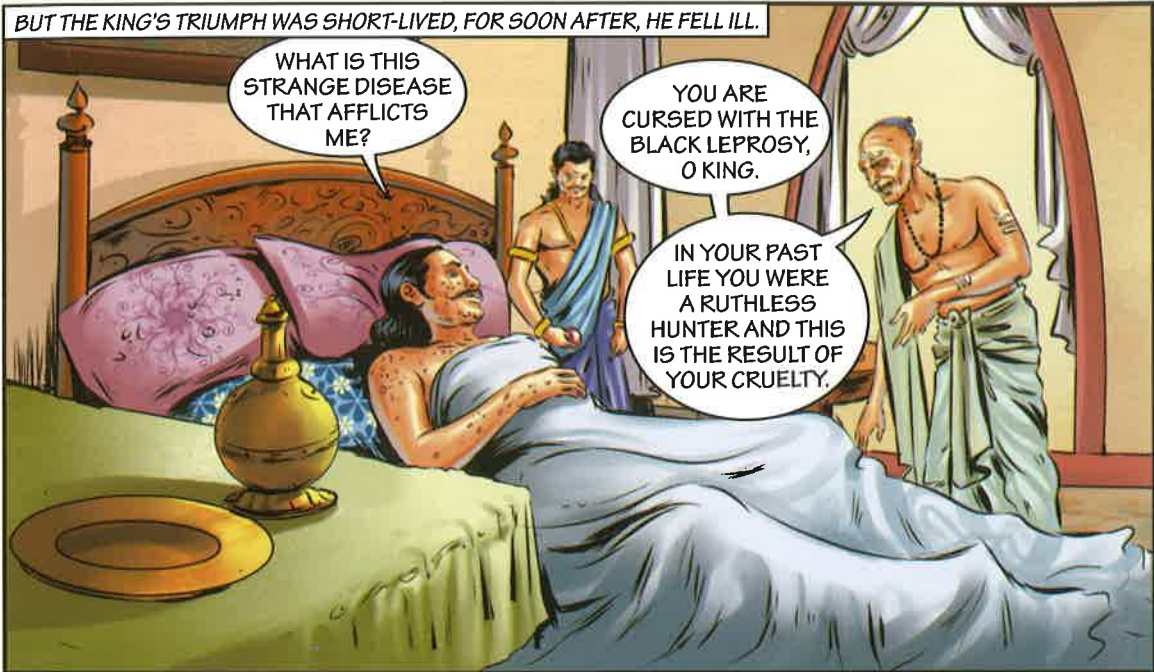
*RELIGIOUS SONG







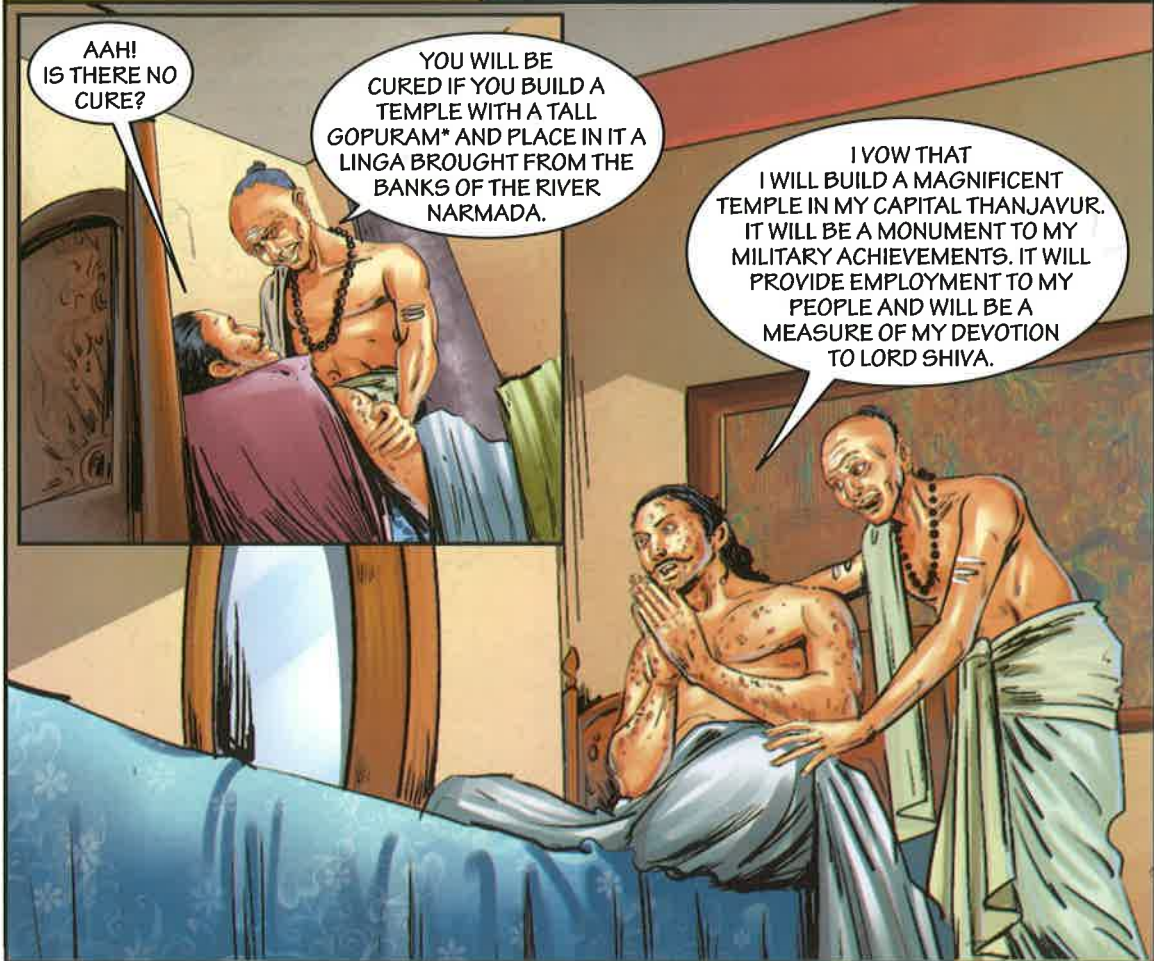
BUT THE KING'S TRIUMPH WAS SHORT-LIVED, FOR SOON AFTER, HE FELL ILL.



WHAT IS THIS STRANGE DISEASE THAT AFFLICTS ME?

YOU ARE CURSED WITH THE BLACK LEPROSY, O KING.

IN YOUR PAST LIFE YOU WERE A RUTHLESS HUNTER AND THIS IS THE RESULT OF YOUR CRUELTY.

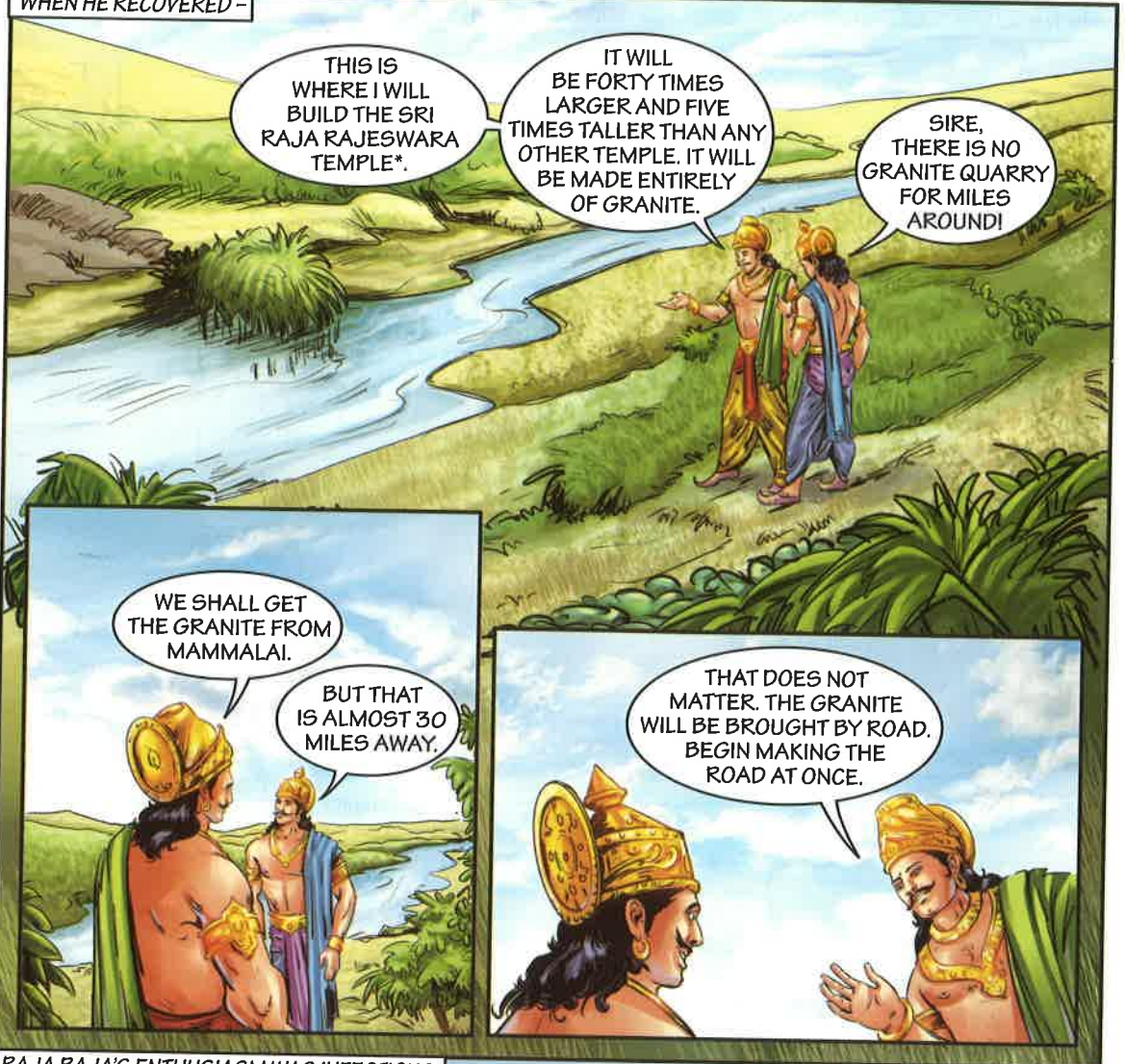


AAH! IS THERE NO CURE?

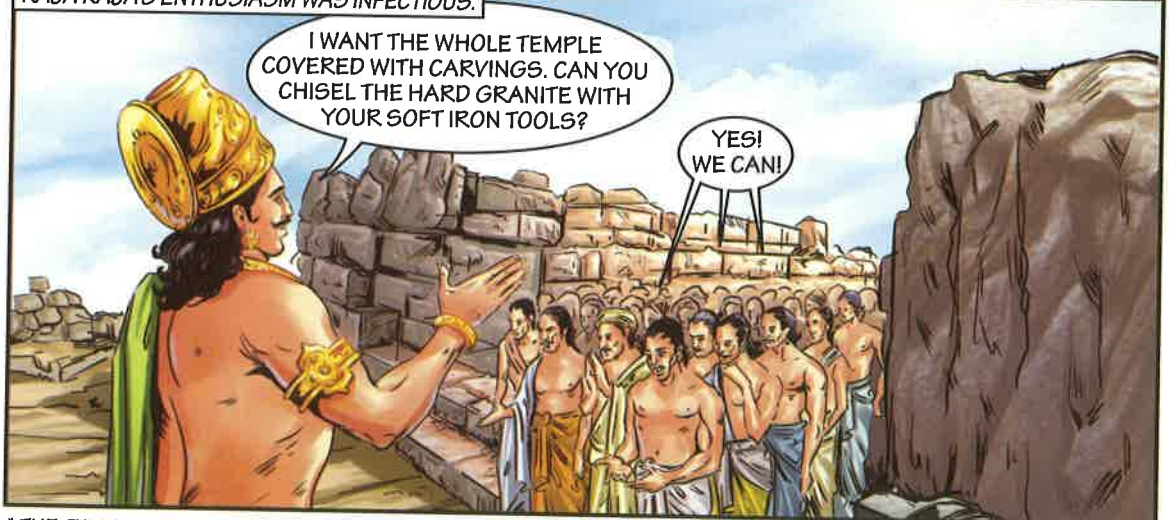
YOU WILL BE CURED IF YOU BUILD A TEMPLE WITH A TALL GOPURAM* AND PLACE IN IT A LINGA BROUGHT FROM THE BANKS OF THE RIVER NARMADA.

I VOW THAT I WILL BUILD A MAGNIFICENT TEMPLE IN MY CAPITAL THANJAVUR. IT WILL BE A MONUMENT TO MY MILITARY ACHIEVEMENTS. IT WILL PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT TO MY PEOPLE AND WILL BE A MEASURE OF MY DEVOTION TO LORD SHIVA.

WHEN HE RECOVERED -

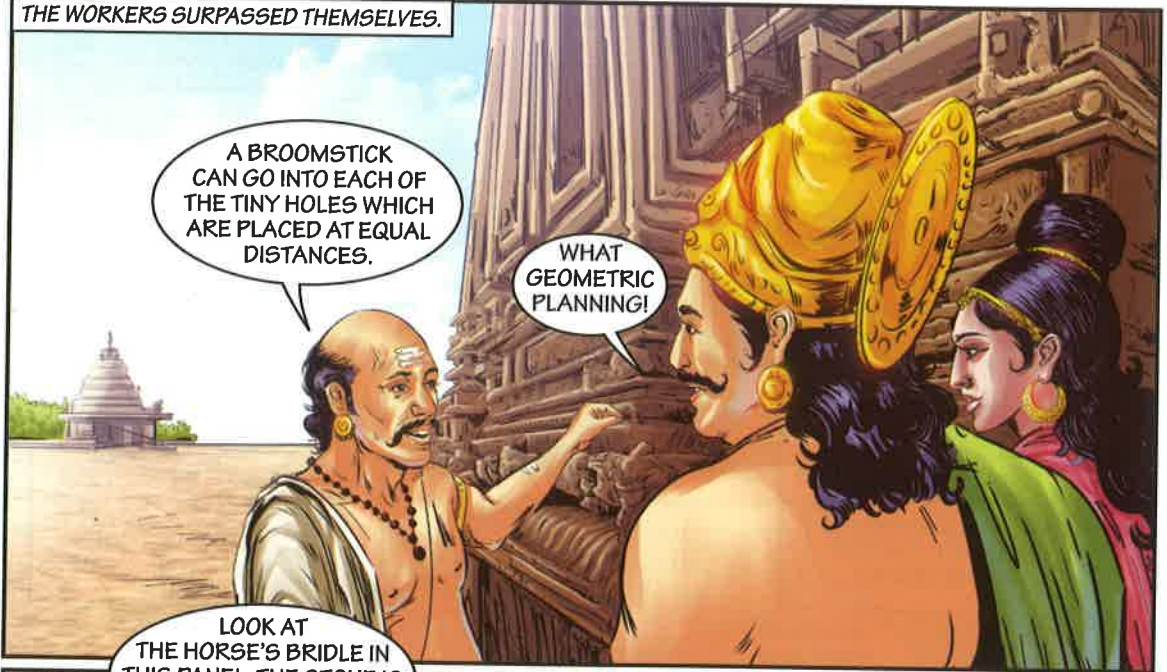


RAJA RAJA'S ENTHUSIASM WAS INFECTIOUS.



* THE TEMPLE CAME TO BE KNOWN AS THE BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE, POPULARLY CALLED THE BIG TEMPLE.

THE WORKERS SURPASSED THEMSELVES.



A BROOMSTICK CAN GO INTO EACH OF THE TINY HOLES WHICH ARE PLACED AT EQUAL DISTANCES.

WHAT GEOMETRIC PLANNING!

LOOK AT THE HORSE'S BRIDLE IN THIS PANEL. THE STONE IS CARVED TO LOOK LIKE A REAL ROPE.

THE 18-FOOT HIGH DWARAPALAKAS OR GATEKEEPERS ASTOUNDED ALL.



IT IS BIGGER THAN A FULL-GROWN ELEPHANT!

IT IS SAID THAT THE CAPSTONE OF THE TEMPLE WAS MADE OF A SINGLE STONE WHICH ORIGINALLY BELONGED TO A COWHERDESS.

I WISH
I COULD GIVE THIS
STONE TO THE BIG
TEMPLE.

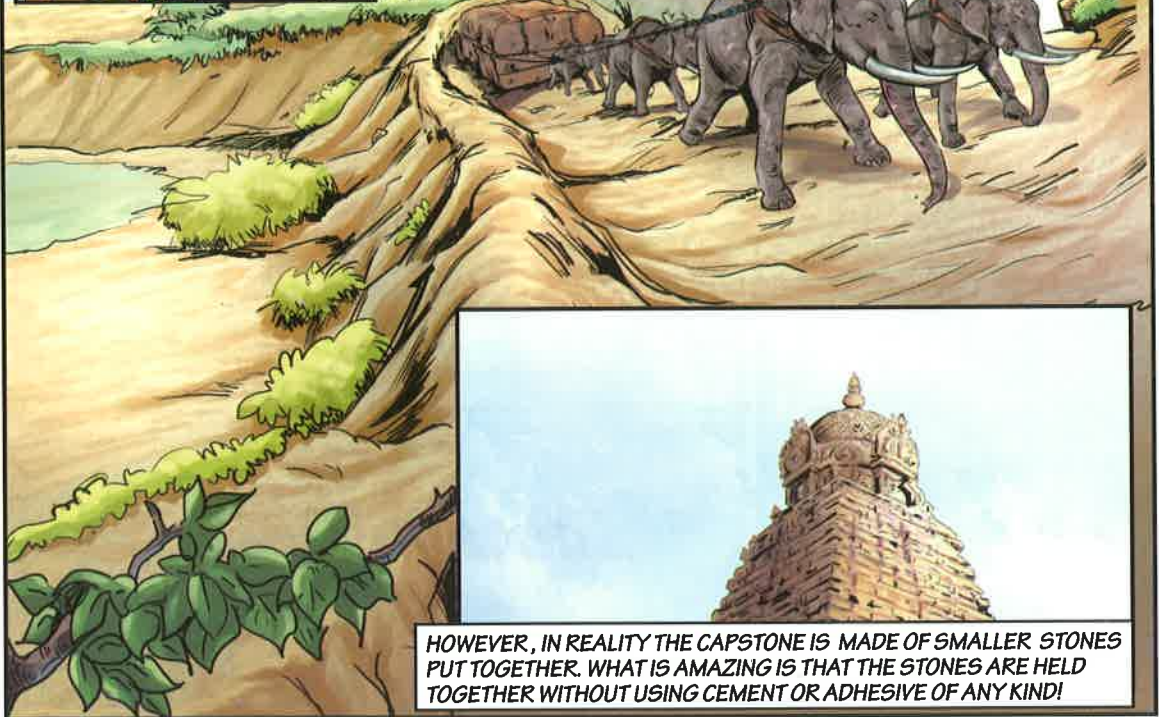
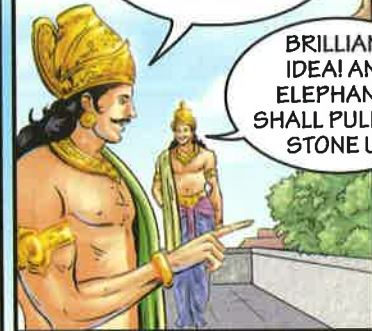
THE CAPSTONE WAS READIED,
AND THEN -

LET A LONG
RAMP BE BUILT
FROM THE WOMAN'S
HOUSE TO THE TOP
OF THE TEMPLE.

BRILLIANT
IDEA! AND
ELEPHANTS
SHALL PULL THE
STONE UP.

YOUR
WISH SHALL BE
COMMUNICATED TO
THE KING.

DID THAT
VOICE COME FROM
HEAVEN?



HOWEVER, IN REALITY THE CAPSTONE IS MADE OF SMALLER STONES
PUT TOGETHER. WHAT IS AMAZING IS THAT THE STONES ARE HELD
TOGETHER WITHOUT USING CEMENT OR ADHESIVE OF ANY KIND!

A HUGE STATUE OF NANDI STANDS AT THE ENTRANCE. THERE IS A STORY THAT ONCE RAJA RAJA STOOD QUIETLY WATCHING THE SCULPTOR AT WORK.



WHEN THE STATUE WAS DONE -

IS IT MY
IMAGINATION
OR HAS THE NANDI
GROWN BIGGER
SINCE I SAW IT
LAST?

YOUR
MAJESTY, A LIVE
TOAD IS TRAPPED IN THE
STONE WHICH CAUSES
IT TO GROW.

THEN YOU
MUST RELEASE
THE CREATURE.



IT WILL
BE SAFE IN
THIS SACRED
POND.

I WANT YOU TO INSCRIBE ON THE WALLS A LIST OF THE GIFTS GIVEN BY ME, MY FAMILY AND MY PEOPLE TO THE TEMPLE.

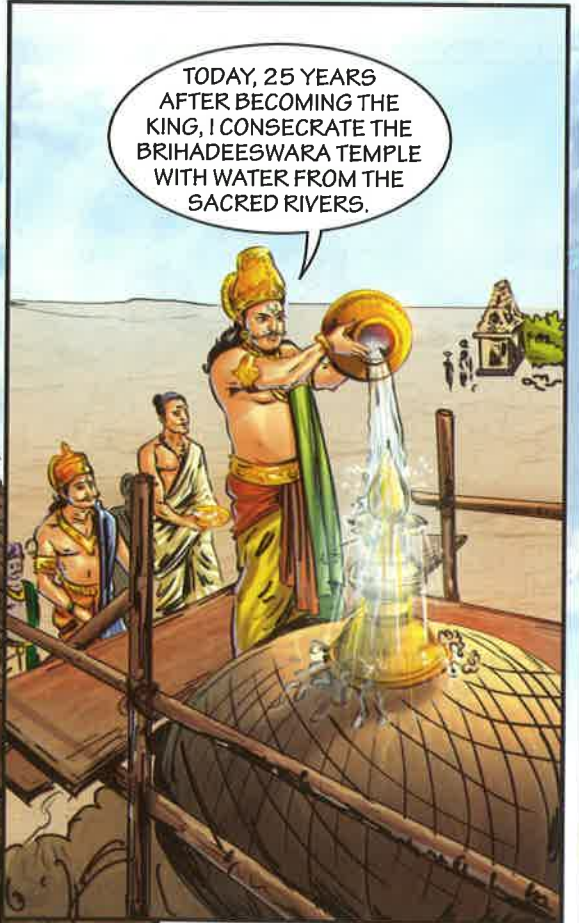


THE INSCRIPTIONS GIVE DETAILS ABOUT THE REIGN OF THE CHOLAS.

THE TEMPLE WAS FINALLY COMPLETED IN 1010 CE.



TODAY, 25 YEARS AFTER BECOMING THE KING, I CONSECRATE THE BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE WITH WATER FROM THE SACRED RIVERS.



RAJA RAJA CHOLA HAD ALSO ORDERED THE WALLS OF THE TEMPLE TO BE ADORNED WITH FRESCOES.

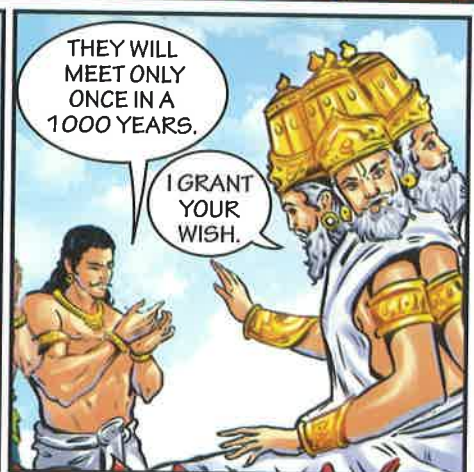
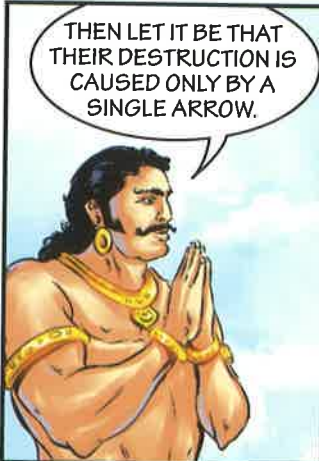


THE MOST MAGNIFICENT OF THESE PAINTINGS IS THAT OF SHIVA AS TRIPURANTAKA*.



THE STORY GOES THAT ...

... ONCE, THREE ASURA BROTHERS, KAMARAKSHA, TAARAKAKSHA AND VIDYUNMALI PERFORMED INTENSE PENANCE TO BRAHMA. AFTER MANY YEARS, BRAHMA APPEARED TO GRANT THEM A BOON.



* THE FORM IN WHICH SHIVA DESTROYED TRIPURA

THE THREE CITIES WERE JOINTLY CALLED TRIPURA.



FILLED WITH A SENSE OF POWER, THE BROTHERS LET LOOSE A REIGN OF TERROR.

NO ONE CAN TOUCH US. WE HAVE BRAHMA'S BOON!

HELP!

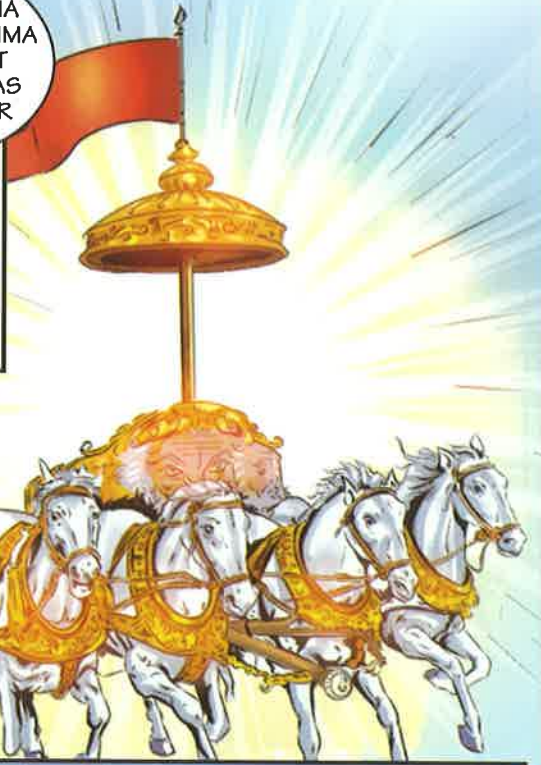
HELP!

I MUST DESTROY THESE THREE.



MOUNT MERU
SHALL BE MY BOW,
VASUKI THE SERPENT ITS
STRING AND VISHNU THE
ARROW, WITH AGNI AT
THE TIP AND VAYU
AT THE END.

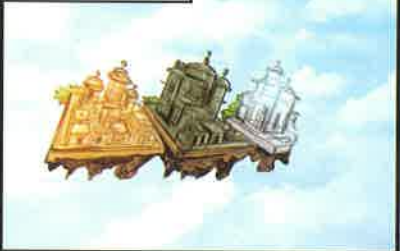
I, VISHWAKARMA
WILL MAKE BRAHMA
YOUR CHARIOT
AND FOUR DEVAS
SHALL BE YOUR
HORSES.



SHIVA WAITED FOR THE BROTHERS TO MEET AFTER A 1000
YEARS. WHEN THEY DID MEET ...



... AND THE THREE CITIES
CAME INTO LINE -



THIS ONE
ARROW
SHALL KILL
THEM ALL.



AND THUS SHIVA ENDED THE TYRANNY OF THE THREE ASURAS.

ANOTHER FRESCO TELLS THE STORY OF SUNDARAR, A SHAIVITE* SAINT.



SUNDARAR WAS THE ADOPTED SON OF THE CHIEF OF A LOCAL KINGDOM. AT HIS WEDDING -



STOP! THIS MAN SUNDARAR IS MY SLAVE. I HAVE THIS PALM SCRIPT SIGNED BY HIS FOREFATHERS TO PROVE IT.

SUNDARAR FOLLOWED THE OLD MAN TO A TEMPLE.

ALAS, SUNDARAR! WHAT THIS MAN SAYS IS TRUE. HE IS NOW YOUR MASTER.

ENOUGH CHATTER! NOW FOLLOW ME.

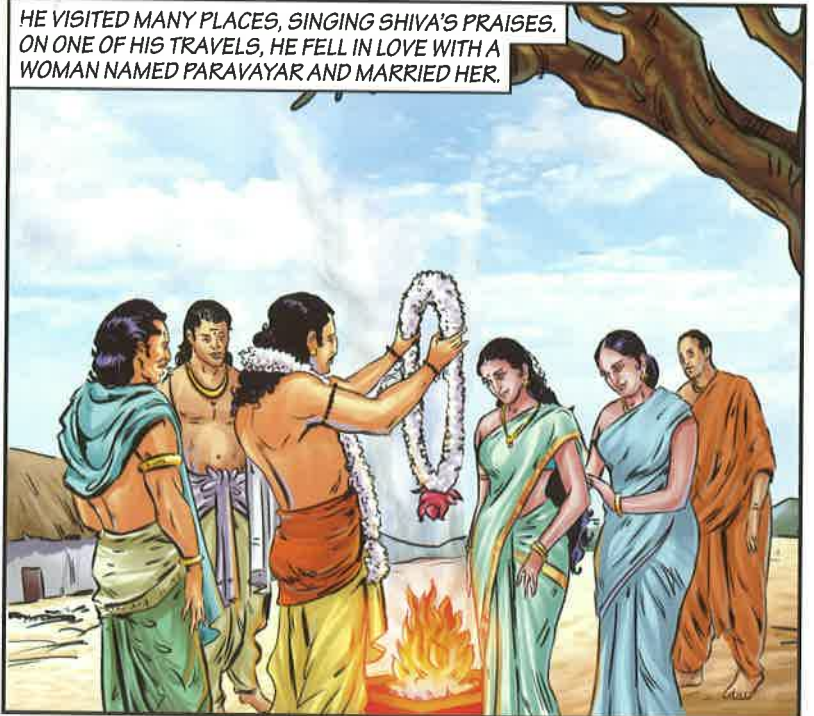




SUNDARAR COMPOSED MANY SONGS AND WROTE ABOUT THE SHAIVITE SAINTS.



HE VISITED MANY PLACES, SINGING SHIVA'S PRAISES. ON ONE OF HIS TRAVELS, HE FELL IN LOVE WITH A WOMAN NAMED PARAVAYAR AND MARRIED HER.



AFTER SOME YEARS HE MARRIED ANOTHER WOMAN CALLED SANGLIYAR.

YOU HAVE SINNED BY MARRYING TWO WOMEN! YOU WILL BE BLINDED FOR THIS SIN.

AAH!

THOUGH HE WAS BLIND, SUNDARAR CONTINUED TO SING SHIVA'S PRAISES.

FINALLY -

I'M PLEASED WITH YOUR DEVOTION, SUNDARAR. YOUR EYESIGHT WILL BE RESTORED.

MANY YEARS LATER -

IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO LEAVE THE EARTH, SUNDARAR. I HAVE SENT INDRA'S WHITE ELEPHANT TO FETCH YOU TO MY ABODE ON MOUNT KAILASA.

RAJENDRA CHOLA CONSTRUCTED A HUGE ARTIFICIAL LAKE AT GANGAIKONDA CHOLAPURAM.



HE ALSO BUILT A TEMPLE THERE.

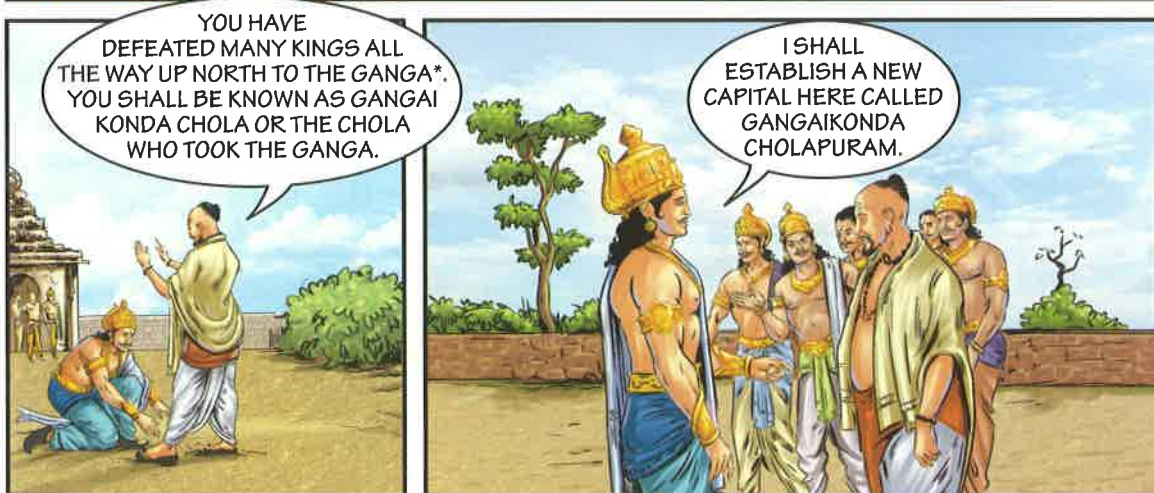


UNDER RAJENDRA CHOLA, THE CHOLA EMPIRE REACHED ITS ZENITH, ITS INFLUENCE REACHING AS FAR AS DISTANT JAVA AND SUMATRA.



THOUGH THE CHOLA EMPIRE ENDED IN 1279 AD, THE MONUMENTS THEY BUILT IN AND AROUND THANJAVUR CONTINUE TO ENTHRALL THOUSANDS OF VISITORS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

WHEN RAJA RAJA DIED, HIS SON RAJENDRA CHOLA FURTHER EXPANDED THE EMPIRE.



* THE RIVER GANGA

MORE ABOUT THANJAVUR



THE MARATHAS AND THE NAYAKS WHO RULED THANJAVUR IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD CONTRIBUTED GREATLY TO ITS RICH HERITAGE. THE SUBRAMANYA SHRINE IN THE BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE COMPLEX HAS A PORTRAIT GALLERY OF THE MARATHA RULERS OF THANJAVUR.

THANJAVUR PAINTINGS ARE FAMOUS FOR THEIR UNIQUE STYLE. EARLIER, STRIPS OF REAL GOLD AND GEMS WERE USED IN THE PAINTINGS.

THANJAVUR IS ALSO KNOWN FOR ITS BRONZE SCULPTURES. THESE CAN BE SEEN IN THE ART VILLAGE WHERE THEY ARE MADE USING TRADITIONAL METHODS.



THE RAJAGOPALA CANNON IN THANJAVUR IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST AND LONGEST GUNS. THIS CANNON WAS CALLED THE AGNIYANTRA OR FIRE-BREATHING WEAPON IN MARATHA TIMES. IT WAS MADE IN THE 1600S DURING THE REIGN OF RAGUNATHA NAYAK AND HAS NEVER BEEN MOVED FROM WHERE IT WAS ORIGINALLY PLACED! DESPITE BEING IN THE OPEN THE CANNON HAS NOT RUSTED.

IN 1931, S.K. GOVINDASWAMI, A YOUNG LECTURER, WAS EXPLORING THE DARK NARROW PASSAGE SURROUNDING THE SANCTUM OF THE BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE WHEN HE FOUND SOMETHING BENEATH THE CRACKED PLASTER OF THE WALLS. IT WAS THE CHOLA FREScoes WHICH HAD BEEN HIDDEN FROM SIGHT FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS!